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(54) **IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS HAVING DEVELOPER CARTRIDGES AND CARTRIDGE SUPPORTING MEMBER**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***G03G 21/1814*** (2013.01); *G03G 15/0886* (2013.01); *G03G 15/0891* (2013.01);
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USPC 399/110, 258, 262
See application file for complete search history.

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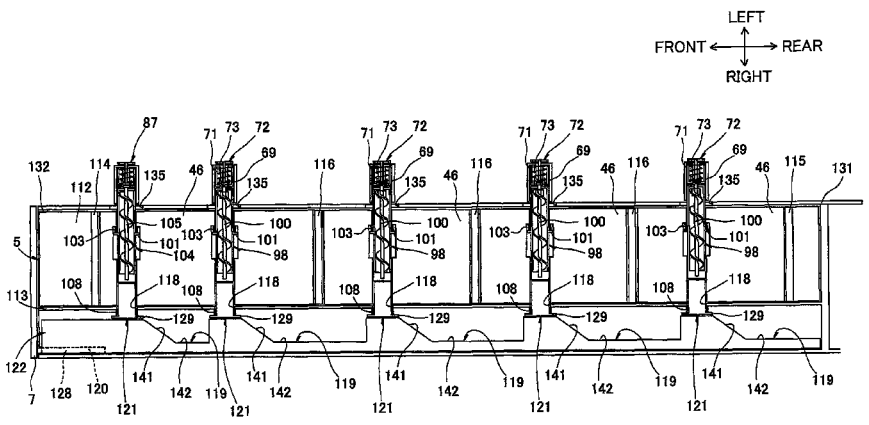
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An image forming apparatus includes process units and developer cartridges; a process unit supporting member; a cartridge supporting member; and a moving mechanism. Each developer cartridge includes a transporting member configured to transport developer to a corresponding process unit. The moving mechanism is configured to move each transporting member between a communicated position, in which developer is transported to the corresponding process unit, and an interrupted position, in which transporting of developer to the corresponding process unit is interrupted. The transporting member positioned in the interrupted position allows the cartridge supporting member to move from an attached position to a withdrawn position and allows the process unit supporting member to be withdrawn, and the transporting member positioned in the communicated position prevents the cartridge supporting member from moving from the attached position to the withdrawn position and prevents the process unit supporting member from being withdrawn.

14 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



(51) **Int. Cl.**
G03G 21/18 (2006.01)
G03G 21/16 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC *G03G21/1633* (2013.01); *G03G 21/1642* (2013.01); *G03G 2215/066* (2013.01); *G03G 2221/169* (2013.01); *G03G 2221/1684* (2013.01); *G03G 2221/1869* (2013.01)

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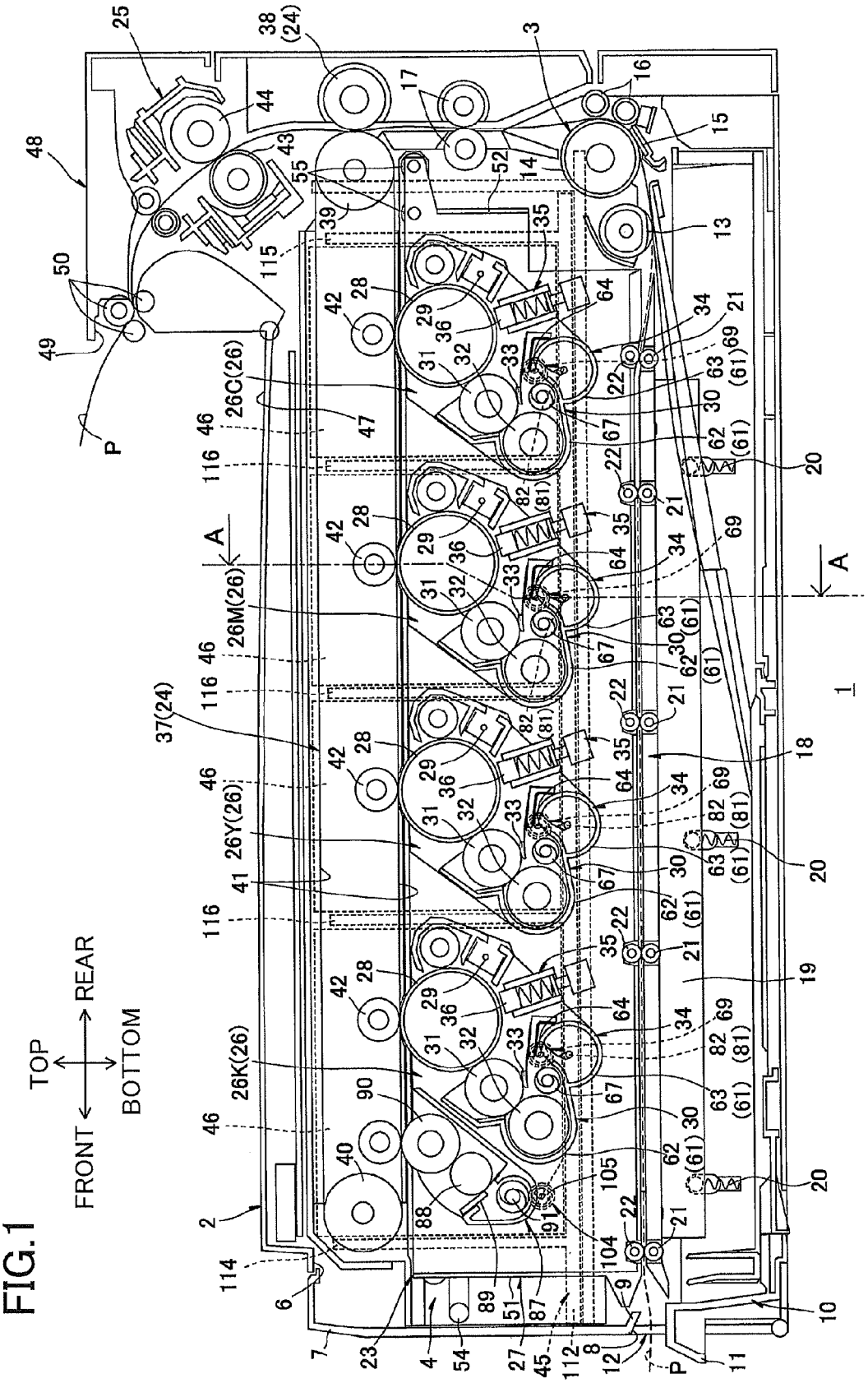
FIG.1



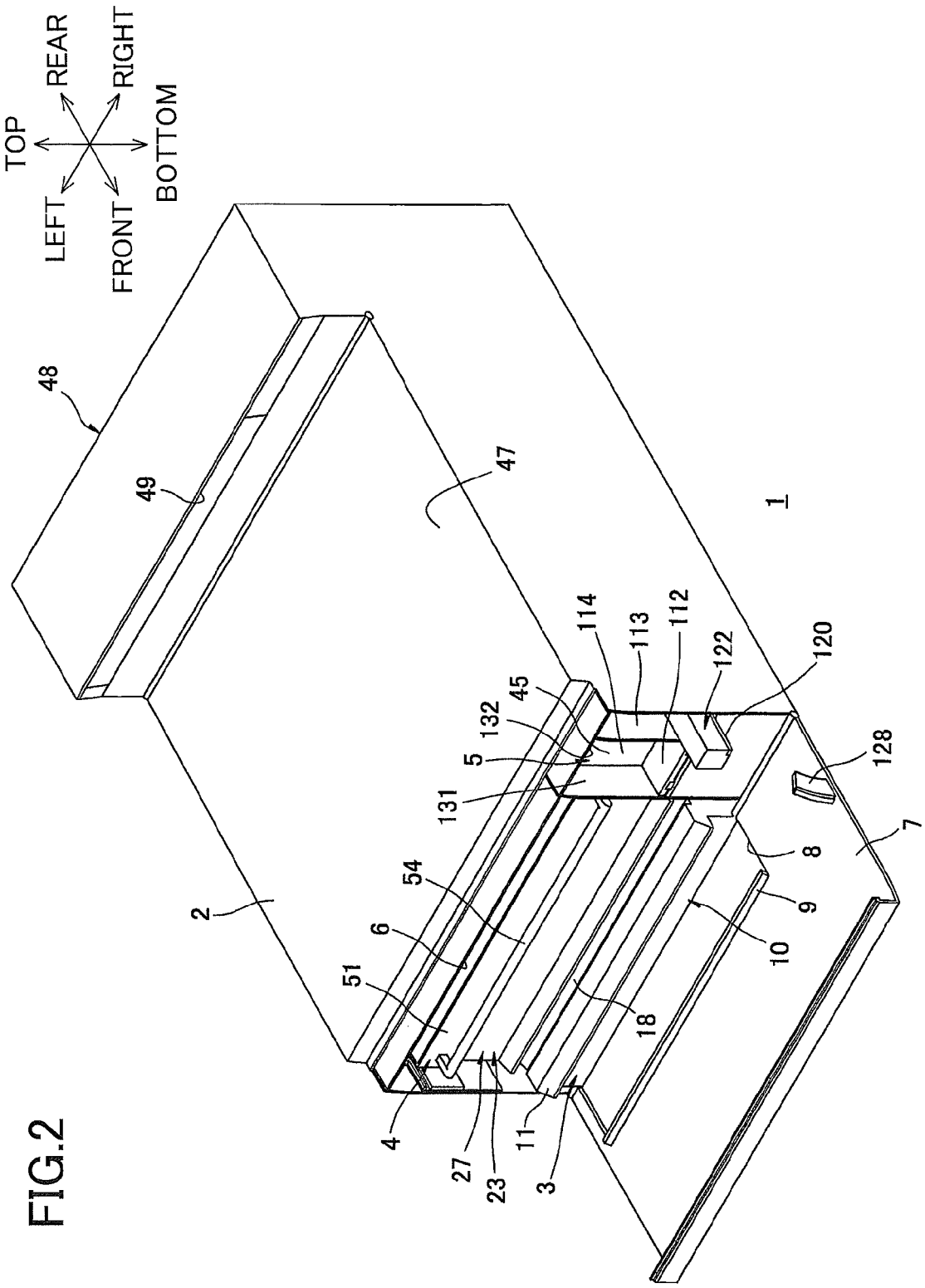

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FIG.2

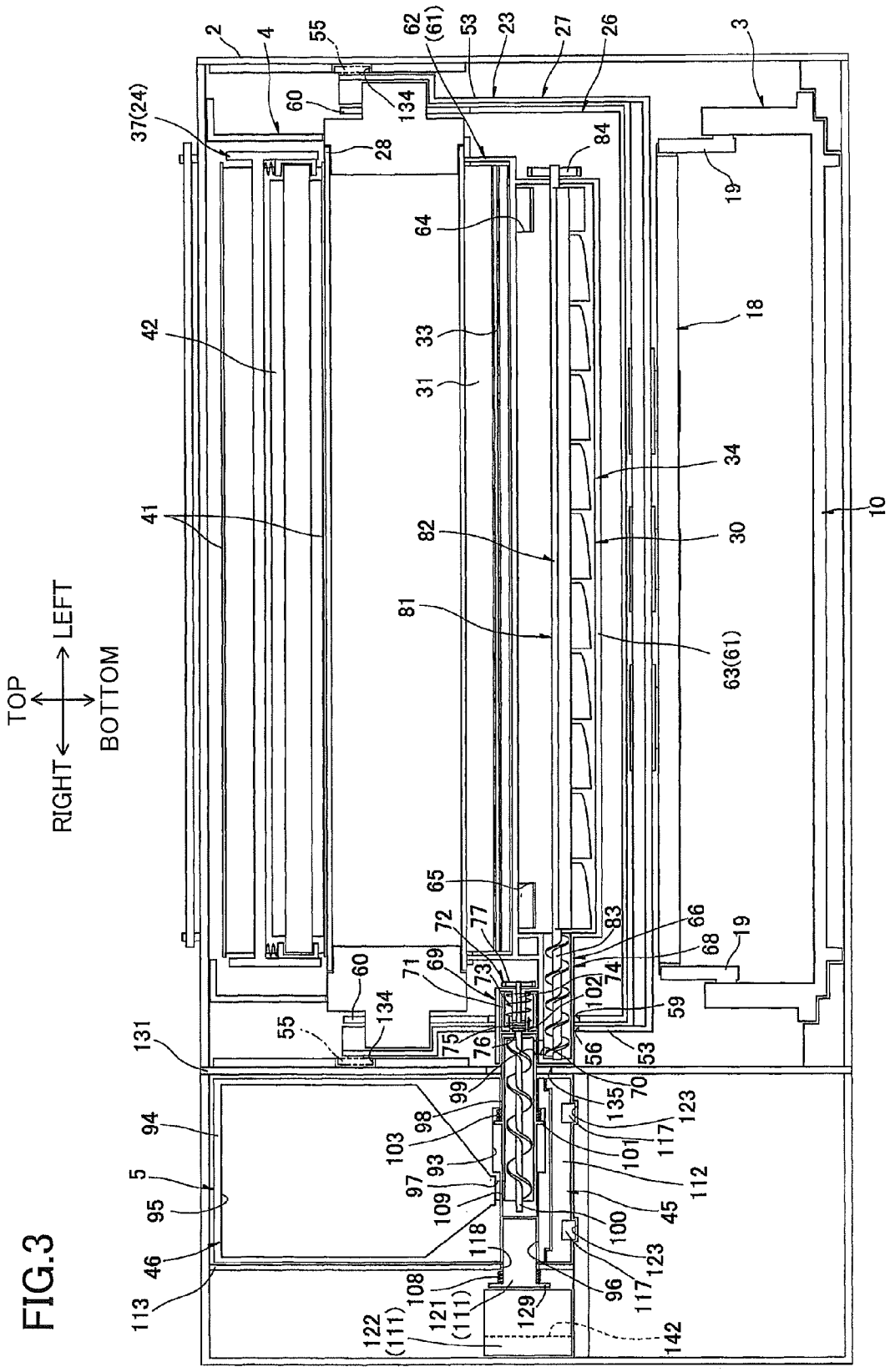
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FIG.3

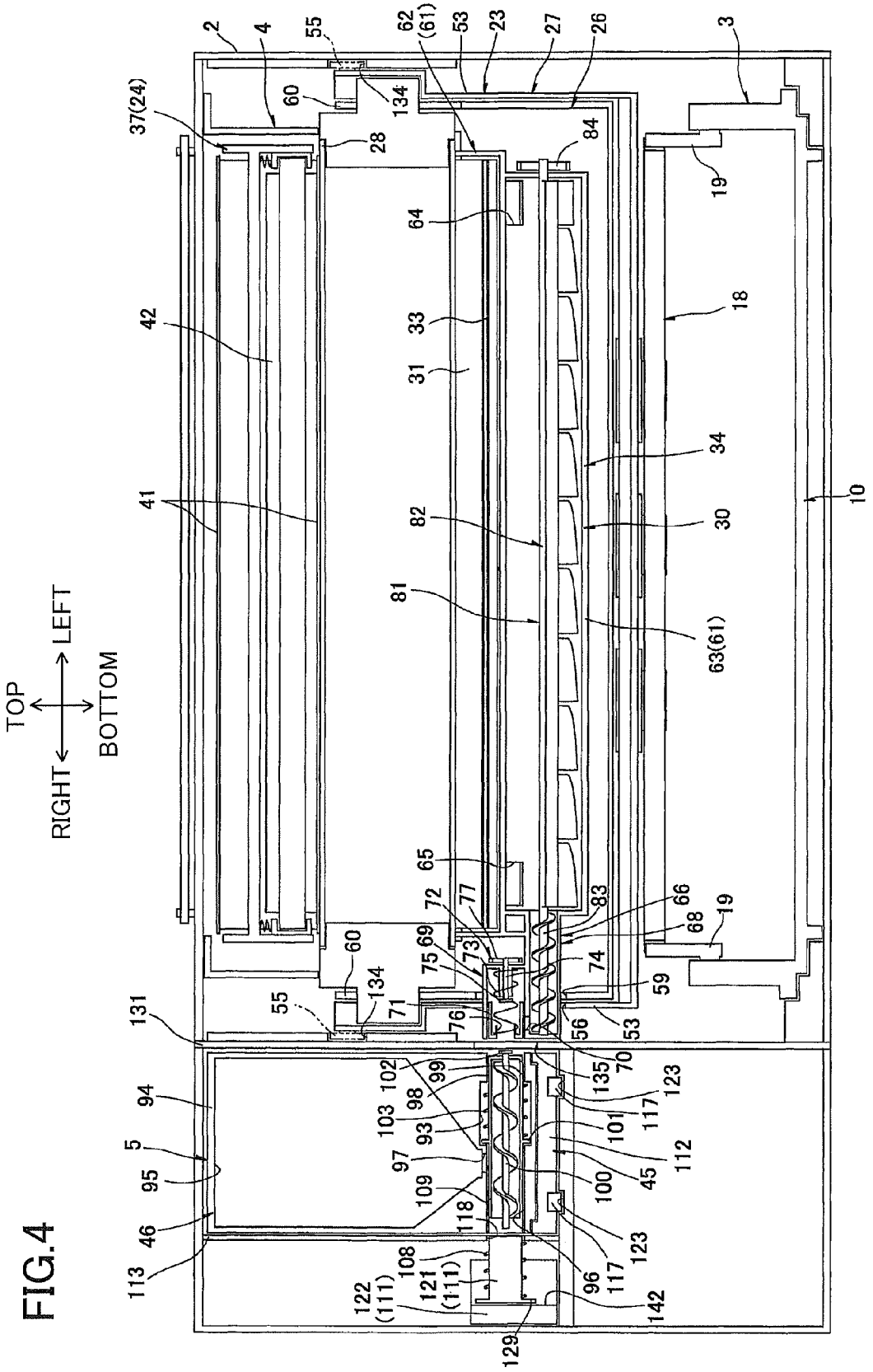
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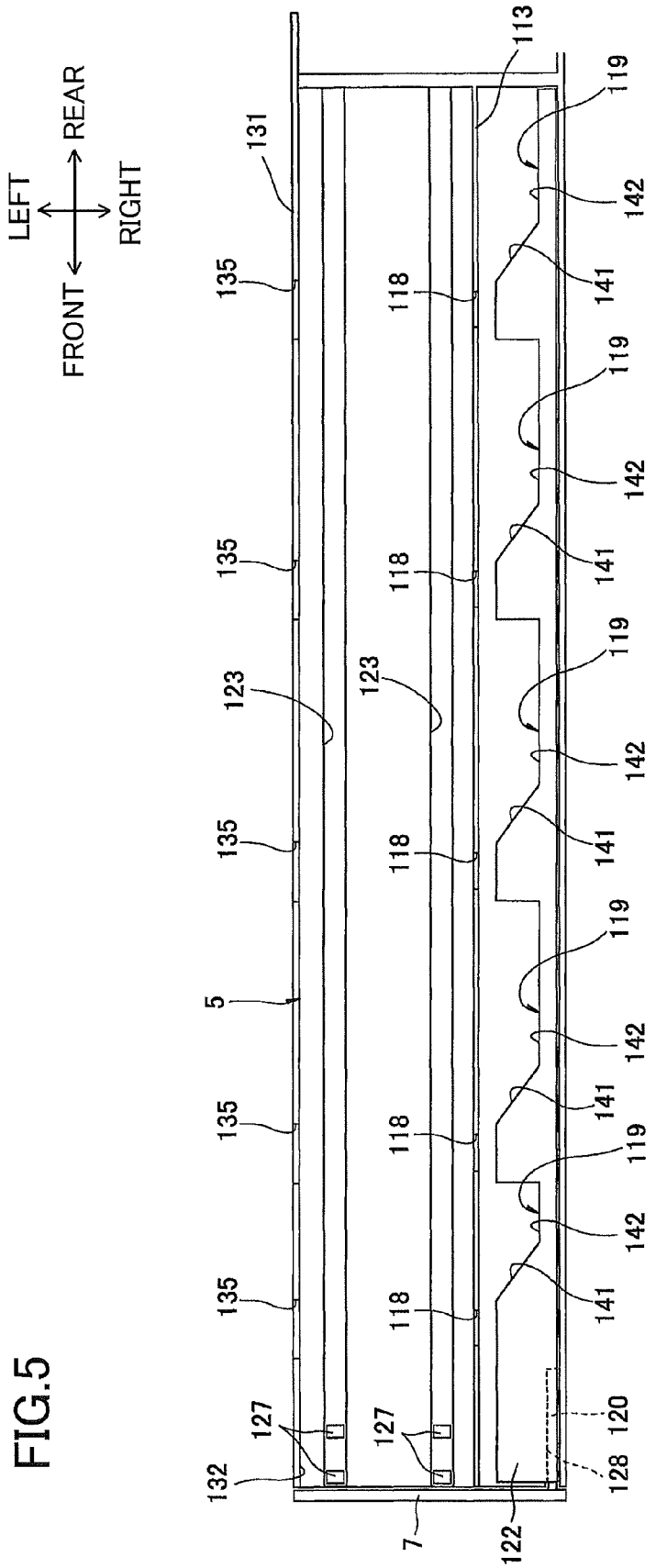
FIG.4

FIG.5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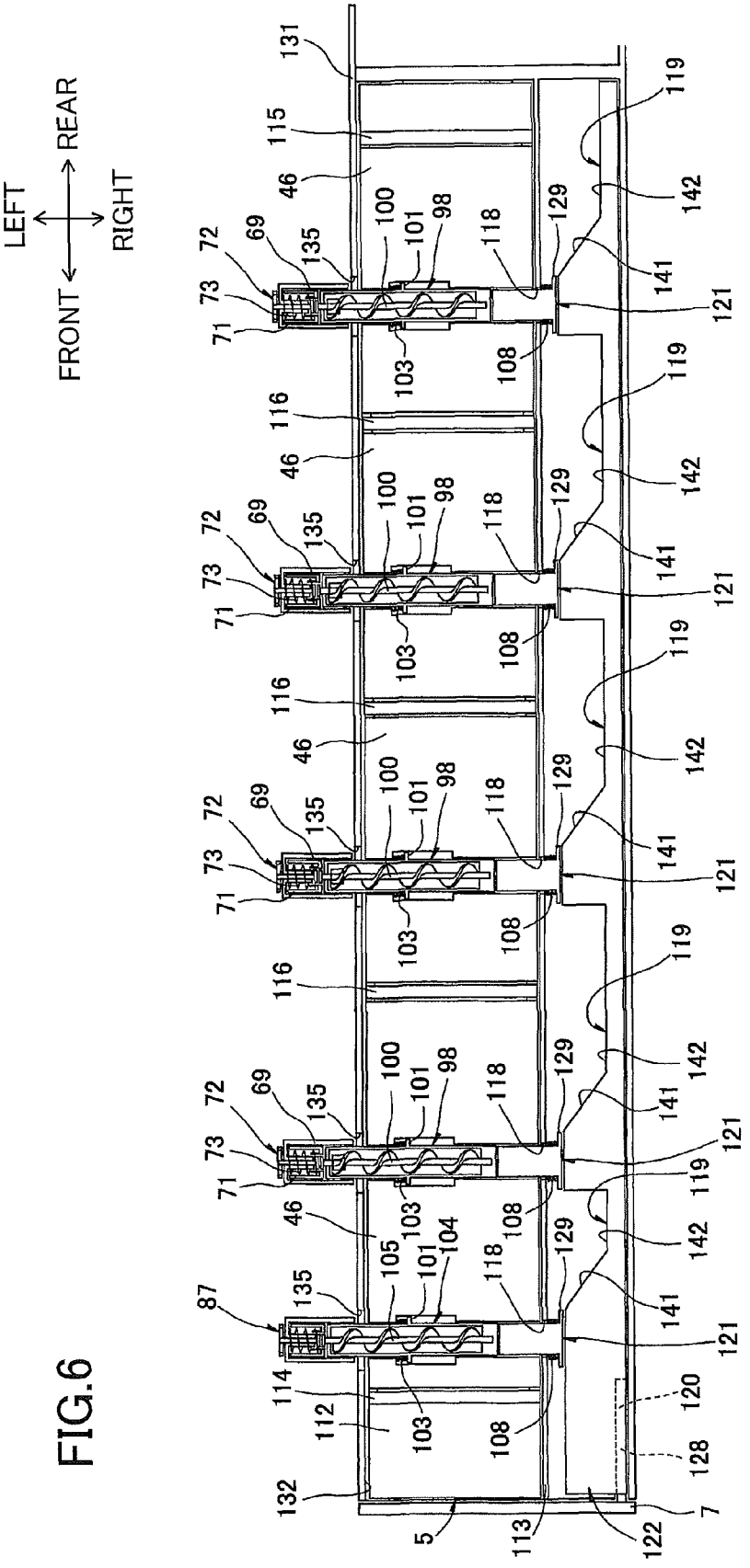
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FIG.6

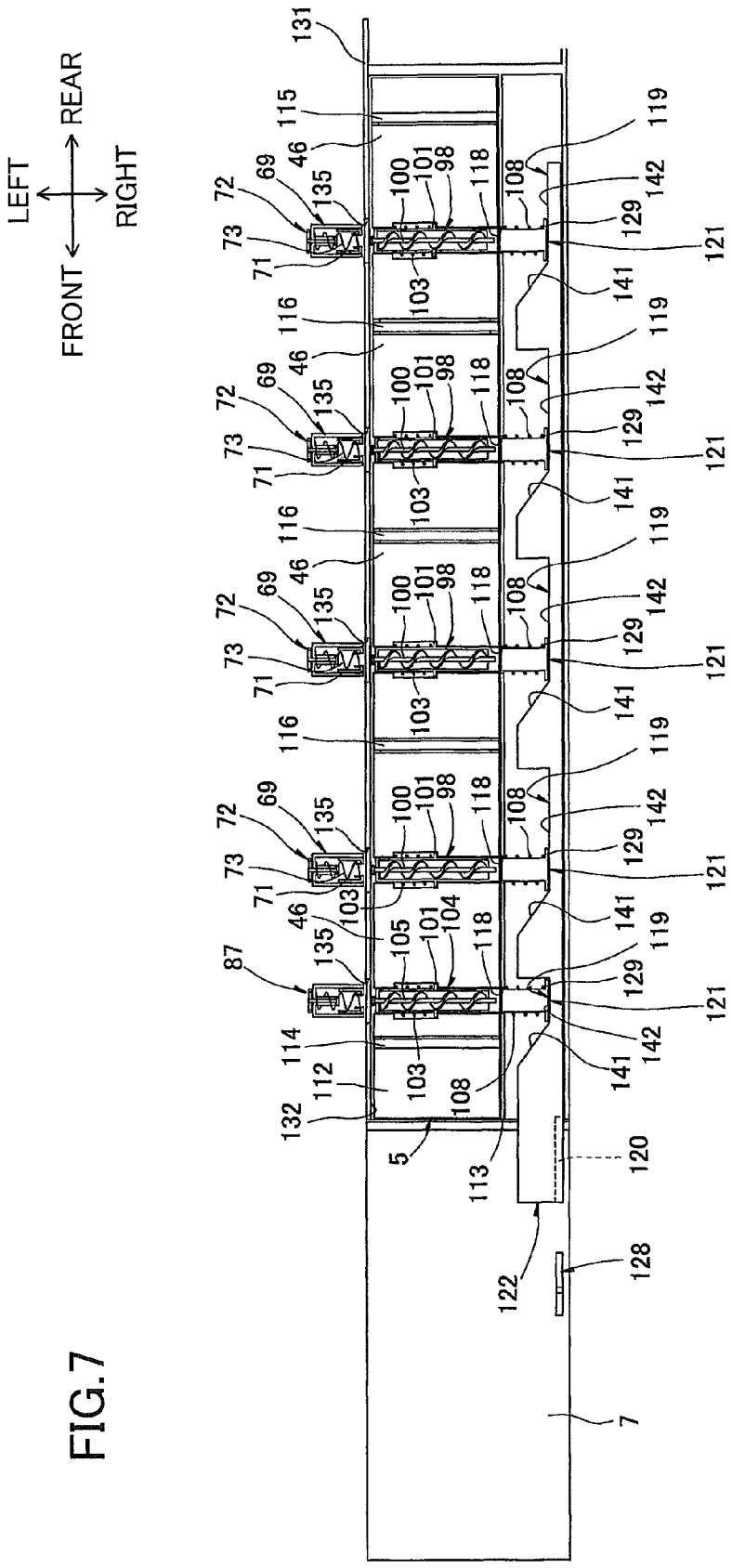

FIG.7

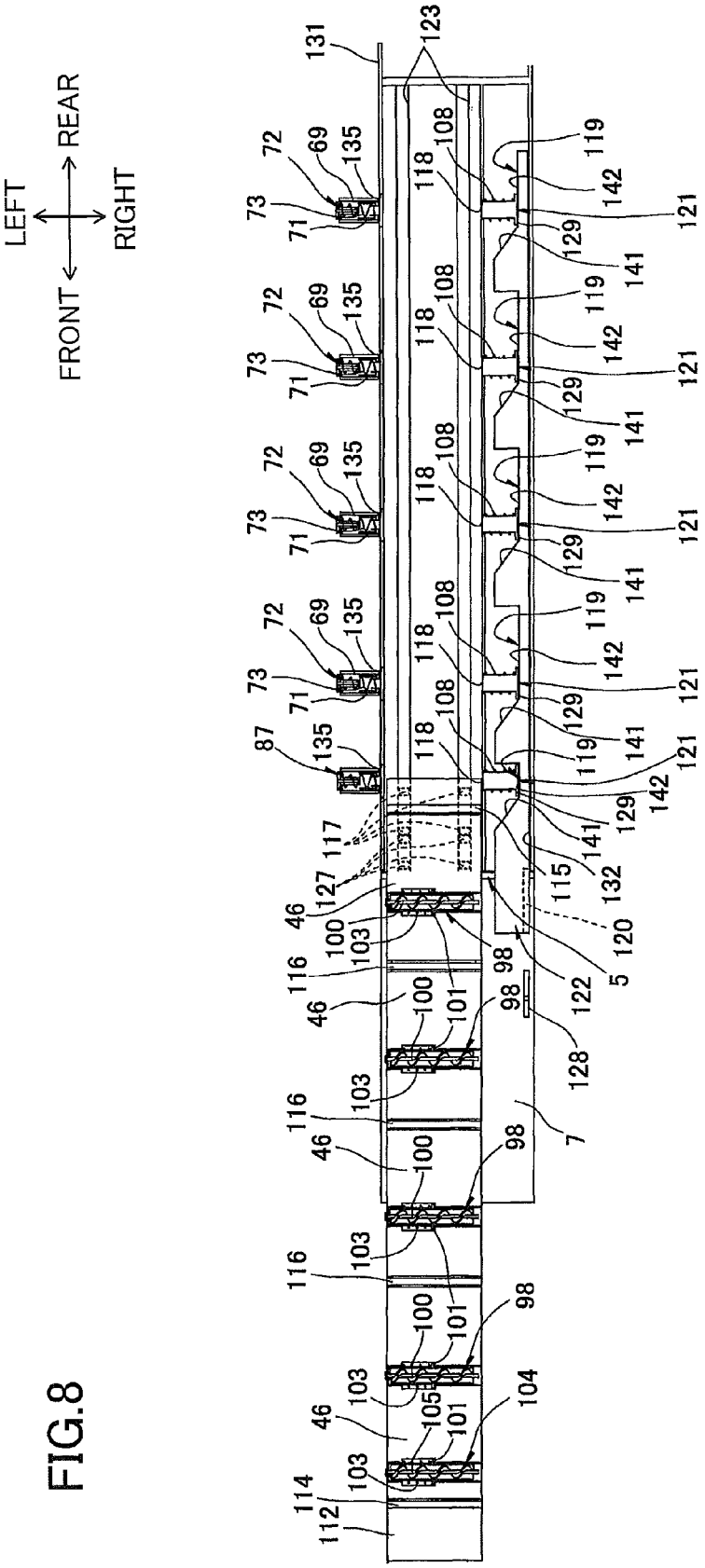

FIG.8

FIG.9

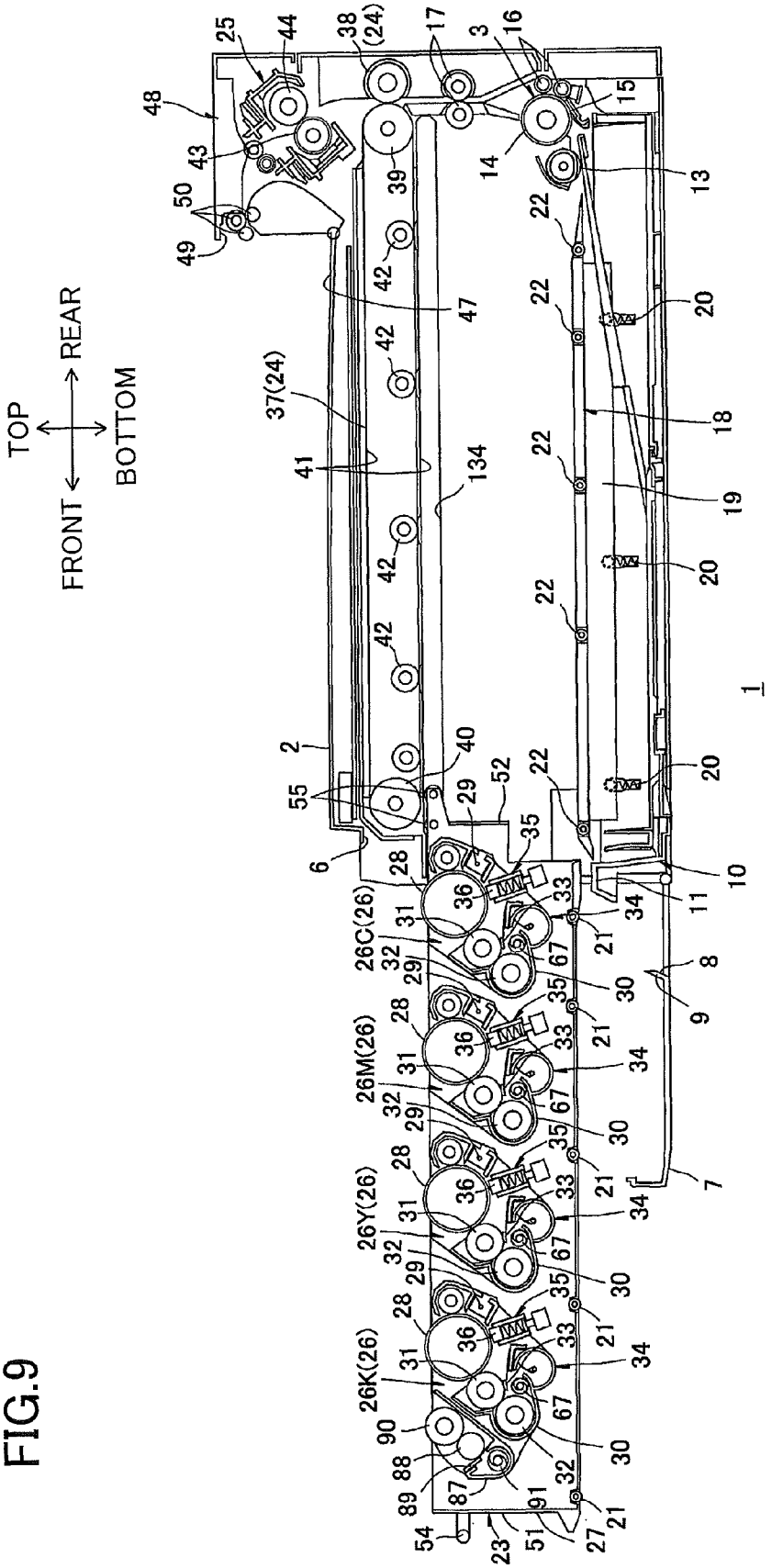
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IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS HAVING DEVELOPER CARTRIDGES AND CARTRIDGE SUPPORTING MEMBER

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/423,338, filed on Mar. 19, 2012, which claims priority from Japanese Patent Application No. 2011-167116 filed Jul. 29, 2011. The contents of the above noted applications are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an image-forming device employing an electrophotographic system and a developer cartridge.

BACKGROUND

One electrophotographic color printer known in the art is a tandem-type color laser printer. This printer has four photosensitive members and four developing rollers for supplying toner to respective photosensitive members, the photosensitive members and developing rollers provided respectively for the toner colors yellow, magenta, cyan, and black.

An example of this type of tandem color laser printer includes an image-forming unit having photosensitive members and developing rollers; and toner cartridges accommodating toner.

The image-forming unit in this type of printer is centrally disposed inside the printer, while the toner cartridges are detachably provided in a lateral section of the printer.

SUMMARY

However, the toner cartridges in the conventional printer described above are mounted in and removed from the lateral section of the printer (that is, a cartridge-accommodating section) in the axial direction of the photosensitive member. Consequently, the printer must be installed such that a large space is available on the side of the printer for mounting and removing the toner cartridges. Hence, this configuration can make it difficult to install the printer in a small space (i.e., the structure is not conducive to reducing the required installation space of the printer).

This printer configuration is also not conducive to installation on shelves and in other locations with limited space above and to the side of the printer, thereby reducing the user's options for locations in which the printer can be installed.

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide an image-forming apparatus provided with developer cartridge that can reduce the required installation space and increase the user's freedom in choosing locations for installing the device.

In order to attain the above and other objects, there is provided an image forming apparatus including: a main casing; a plurality of process units; a plurality of developer cartridges; a process unit supporting member; a cartridge supporting member; and a moving mechanism. Each of the plurality of process units includes a photosensitive drum; and a developer carrying member. The developer carrying member is disposed in confrontation with the photosensitive drum. Each of the plurality of developer cartridges is configured to be provided for each of the plurality of process units. Each of the plurality of developer cartridges includes a developer accommodating section: and a transporting member. The developer accommodating section is configured to accommodate developer. The transporting member is configured to transport developer in the developer accommodating section to a corresponding one of the plurality of process units and to be moved between a communicated position, in which developer is transported to the corresponding one of the plurality of process units, and an interrupted position, in which transporting of developer to the corresponding one of the plurality of process units is interrupted. The process unit supporting member is configured to hold the plurality of process units together therein and to be withdrawn in a predetermined direction. The cartridge supporting member is configured to hold the plurality of developer cartridges together therein and to move between an attached position, in which the cartridge supporting member is attached to the main casing, and to withdrawn position, in which the cartridge supporting member is withdrawn from the main casing. The moving mechanism is configured to move each of the plurality of transporting members between the communicated position and the interrupted position. The transporting member positioned in the interrupted position allows the cartridge supporting member to move from the attached position to the withdrawn position and allows the process unit supporting member to be withdrawn, and the transporting member positioned in the communicated position prevents the cartridge supporting member from moving from the attached position to the withdrawn position and prevents the process unit supporting member from being withdrawn.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings:

FIG. **1** is a cross-sectional view of a color printer according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a perspective view of the color printer in FIG. **1**, wherein a front cover is opened;

FIG. **3** is a cross-sectional view of the color printer taken along a line A-A of FIG. **1**, wherein a supply cylinder is in an advanced position;

FIG. **4** is a cross-sectional view of the color printer taken along the line A-A of FIG. **1**, wherein the supply cylinder is in a retracted position;

FIG. **5** is an explanatory diagram illustrating a toner-cartridge-accommodating section shown in FIG. **2** and is a plan view showing a translation cam and guide grooves;

FIG. **6** is an explanatory diagram illustrating a movement of the supply cylinder in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section shown in FIG. **2**, wherein the front cover is closed and the supply cylinder is in the advanced position;

FIG. **7** is an explanatory diagram illustrating the movement of the supply cylinder in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section shown in FIG. **2**, wherein the front cover is opened and the supply cylinder is in the retracted position;

FIG. **8** is an explanatory diagram illustrating the toner-cartridge-accommodating section shown in FIG. **2**, wherein a toner cartridge drawer is in a pulled-out position;

FIG. **9** is an explanatory diagram illustrating the removal and mounting process cartridges shown in FIG. **1**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

1. Overall Structure of a Printer

FIGS. **1** and **2** show a printer **1** serving as an example of the image-forming apparatus of the present invention. The printer **1** is an intermediate transfer tandem-type color printer.

The printer **1** includes a main casing **2** constituting the device body, a sheet-feeding unit **3** for feeding sheets of a paper P to be printed. An image-forming unit **4** for forming images on the paper P supplied by the sheet-feeding unit **3**, and a toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** for accommodating toner cartridges **46** (described later).

(1) Main Casing

The main casing **2** has a substantially rectangular box shape in a side view. A process-side access opening **6** is formed in a side wall of the main casing **2**. A front cover **7** as an opening/closing member is pivotably (movably) disposed on the same side wall of the main casing **2**. The front cover **7** is capable of pivoting about its lower end between a closed position for closing the process-side access opening **6** and an open position for exposing the process-side access opening **6**.

An opening **8** that exposes the front end portion of a paper tray **10** (described later) is formed in a lower portion of the front cover **7**. A manual-paper-feed guide **9** provided on the front cover **7** extends obliquely rearward and downward from the upper edge of the opening **8** toward a position between the bottom wall of a process frame **27** (described later) and the front end portion of a paper-feeding member **18** (described later).

In the following description, the side of the main casing **2** on which the front cover **7** is provided (the left side in FIG. **1**) will be called the "front side," and the opposite side (the right side in FIG. **1**) will be called the "rear side." Further, the left and right sides of the main casing **2** will be based on the perspective of a user facing the front side of the printer **1**. In other words, the near side in FIG. **1** will be the "right side," while the far side will be the "left side."

(2) Sheet-Feeding Unit

The sheet-feeding unit **3** includes a paper tray **10** for accommodating sheets of paper P.

The paper tray **10** is removably mounted in the bottom section of the main casing **2**. A grip part **11** is provided on the front wall of the paper tray **10** near the top edge thereof. The grip part **11** has a general U-shape in cross section, with the opening of the U-shape facing downward. The top surface of the grip part **11** vertically opposes the manual-paper-feed guide **9**, with a gap formed therebetween. The gap formed between the top surface of the grip part **11** and the manual-paper-feed guide **9** defines a manual-paper-feed opening **12** through which sheets of paper P other than those accommodated in the paper tray **10** may be hand-fed.

The sheet-feeding unit **3** also includes a pick-up roller **13** disposed above the rear end of the paper tray **10**, a feeding roller **14** disposed to the rear of the pick-up roller **13**, a feeding pad **15** disposed so as to confront the feeding roller **14** from the bottom side thereof, a pair of top and bottom pinch rollers **16** disposed in contact with the rear side of the feeding roller **14**, and a pair of registration rollers **17** disposed above the feeding roller **14** and opposing each other in the front-to-rear direction.

The pick-up roller **13** rotates to supply sheets of paper P accommodated in the paper tray **10** (indicated by a solid line in FIG. **1**) between the feeding roller **14** and feeding pad **15**, whereby the rotation of the feeding roller **14** separates and feeds the paper one sheet at a time. The rotating feeding roller **14** subsequently supplies each sheet of paper P so as to pass sequentially between the feeding roller **14** and pinch rollers **16** and enter between the registration rollers **17** disposed above the feeding roller **14**. The registration rollers **17** rotate in order to supply the sheets to the image-forming unit **4** (between an intermediate transfer belt **41** and a secondary transfer roller **38**, both described later) at a prescribed timing. This feed path extending from the paper tray **10** to the image forming unit **4** through the pick-up roller **13**, the feeding roller **14**, the feeding pad **15**, the pair of pinch rollers **16**, and the pair of registration rollers corresponds to a first feed path.

A manual-paper-feed path corresponding to second feed path is formed in the sheet-feeding unit **3** between the paper tray **10** and the bottom wall of a process frame **27** (described later).

A paper-feeding member **18** is provided in the paper tray **10**. The paper-feeding member **18** constitutes the bottom wall of the manual-paper-feed path and confronts the bottom wall of a process frame **27** (described later).

The paper-feeding member **18** has a generally flat plate shape that is elongated in the front-to-rear direction. The paper-feeding member **18** is disposed on the upper edges of the paper tray **10** by means of a pair of left and right support plates **19** and various compression springs **20**.

Five tray-side feeding members **21** are rotatably provided in the paper-feeding member **18** at intervals in the front-to-rear direction. While a process frame **27** will be described later, five process-side feeding members **22** are rotatably provided on the bottom wall of the process frame **27** at positions opposing the tray-side feeding members **21**.

The paper P hand-fed through the manual-paper-feed opening **12** (indicated by a dashed line in FIG. **1**) is guided by the manual-paper-feed guide **9** on the front cover **7** and the top surface of the grip part **11** provided on the paper tray **10** to a nip part between the forwardmost process-side feeding members **22** and the forwardmost tray-side feeding members **21**. Each of the process-side feeding members **22** is driven to rotate while the corresponding tray-side feeding members **21** follow, conveying the hand-fed sheet in a rearward direction between the bottom surface of a process frame **27** (described later) and the top surface of the paper-feeding member **18**.

The hand-fed sheets of paper P are guided to the pick-up roller **13** at the rear end of the paper-feeding member **18** and conveyed between the feeding roller **14** and feeding pad **15** by the rotation of the pick-up roller **13**, as described above. The rotating feeding roller **14** then supplies the sheets of paper P sequentially through the feeding roller **14** and pinch rollers **16** to the nip part between the registration rollers **17** disposed above the feeding roller **14**. The rotating registration rollers **17** supply the sheets between an intermediate transfer belt **41** and secondary transfer roller **38**, both described later, at a prescribed timing. The manual-paper-feed path corresponds to a feed path extending from the manual-paper-feed opening **12** to the pick-up roller **13** through the tray-side feeding members **21** and the process-side feeding members **22**.

(3) Image-Forming Unit

The image-forming unit **4** is disposed above the sheet-feeding unit **3** and includes a process unit **23**, a transfer unit **24**, and a fixing unit **25**.

(3-1) Process Unit

The process unit **23** is movably disposed above the paper tray **10** in front of the pick-up roller **13**. The process unit **23** is capable of moving in the front and rear directions between a mounted position in which the process unit **23** is mounted in the main casing **2** (see FIG. **1**), and a pulled-out position in which the process unit **23** is pulled out of the main casing **2** (see FIG. **9**).

The process unit **23** includes four process cartridges **26** as an image forming unit corresponding to the four colors used in image formation, and a process frame **27** for retaining the process cartridges **26** in a detachably mounted state.

The process cartridges **26** are juxtaposedly arranged parallel to one another and spaced at intervals in the front-to-rear direction (a predetermined direction). More specifically, the process cartridges **26** include, in order from front to rear, a

black process cartridge **26**K, a yellow process cartridge **26**Y, a magenta process cartridge **26**M, and a cyan process cartridge **26**C.

Each process cartridge **26** integrally holds a photosensitive drum **28**, a Scorotron charger **29**, and a developing device **30**.

The photosensitive drum **28** has a generally cylindrical shape and is oriented with its axis aligned in the left-to-right direction.

The Scorotron charger **29** is disposed below and rearward of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28**. The Scorotron charger **29** confronts but is separated from the photosensitive drum **28**.

The developing device **30** is disposed below and forward of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28**. The developing device **30** is provided with a developing roller **31** as a developer carrying member.

The developing roller **31** is rotatably supported in the top of the developing device **30** and is disposed in confrontation with the photosensitive drum **28**. A portion of the surface of the developing roller **31** is exposed when viewed from above the developing device **30** (obliquely above and rearward of the developing device **30**) and contacts the photosensitive drum **28** on the lower front side.

Each developing device **30** also includes a supply roller **32** for supplying toner to the developing roller **31**, and a thickness-regulating blade **33** for regulating the thickness of toner carried on the developing roller **31**. Each developing device **30** also includes a toner reservoir **34** disposed below and rearward of the supply roller **32** for storing toner supplied from a toner cartridge **46** (described later).

The black process cartridge **26**K also includes a belt-cleaning roller **90**, a waste toner reservoir **87**, a relay roller **88**, and a scraping blade **89**.

The belt-cleaning roller **90** is rotatably supported in the black process cartridge **26**K in front of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28** and is positioned for contacting the lower portion of an intermediate transfer belt **41** (described later) from below.

The belt-cleaning roller **90** functions to clean off any toner remaining on the surface of the intermediate transfer belt **41** (described later). The relay roller **88** temporarily retains toner cleaned off by the belt-cleaning roller **90**. The toner is subsequently scraped off the relay roller **88** by the scraping blade **89** and is collected in the waste toner reservoir **87**.

An auger screw **91** is rotatably provided in the waste toner reservoir **87** of the black process cartridge **26**K. The auger screw **91** conveys waste toner collected in the waste toner reservoir **87** to a waste-toner-collecting unit (not shown) provided in the black toner cartridge **46** (described later).

The process frame **27** provided in the main casing **2** is capable of sliding in forward and rearward directions. The process frame **27** includes four LED units **35** corresponding to the four photosensitive drums **28**.

Each LED unit **35** is disposed on the rear side of the corresponding developing device **30** so as to face the bottom of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28**. Each LED unit **35** also includes an LED array **36** having a plurality of LEDs arrayed in the left-to-right direction. The LED unit **35** functions to expose the surface of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28** based on prescribed image data.

(3-2) Transfer Unit

The transfer unit **24** includes a belt unit **37**, and a secondary transfer roller **38**.

The belt unit **37** is positioned above the process unit **23** when the process unit **23** is in the mounted position. The belt unit **37** is oriented in the front-to-rear direction so as to confront each of the photosensitive drums **28** from above.

The belt unit **37** includes a drive roller **39**, a follow roller **40**, an intermediate transfer belt **41**, and four primary transfer rollers **42**.

The drive roller **39** and follow roller **40** are separated in the front-to-rear direction.

The intermediate transfer belt **41** is placed around the drive roller **39** and follow roller **40** such that its lower portion contacts each of the photosensitive drums **28**. When the drive roller **39** is driven to rotate, the intermediate transfer belt **41** circulates such that the lower portion of the intermediate transfer belt **41** that contacts each of the photosensitive drums **28** moves in a rearward direction.

The primary transfer rollers **42** are disposed so as to confront the corresponding photosensitive drums **28** with the lower portion of the intermediate transfer belt **41** interposed therebetween.

The secondary transfer roller **38** is provided on the rear side of the belt unit **37** and confronts the drive roller **39** of the belt unit **37** with the intermediate transfer belt **41** interposed therebetween.

(3-3) Fixing Unit

The fixing unit **25** is disposed above the secondary transfer roller **38**. The fixing unit **25** includes a heating roller **43**, and a pressure roller **44** that confronts the heating roller **43**.

(4) Toner-Cartridge-Accommodating Section

As shown in FIGS. **2** and **3**, the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** is provided on the right side of the process unit **23**. A cartridge-side access opening **132** as an opening is formed in the front end of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** adjacent to the process-side access opening **6** on the right thereof. The cartridge-side access opening **132** is exposed simultaneously with the process-side access opening **6** when the front cover **7** is opened. A toner cartridge drawer **45** as a support member is accommodated in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**.

The toner cartridge drawer **45** integrally supports four toner cartridges **46** as a developer cartridge that each accommodates toner (developer) of a discrete color.

The toner cartridge drawer **45** is arranged in a front-to-rear orientation so as to confront all process cartridges **26**. The toner cartridge drawer **45** is capable of moving between a mounted position in which the process cartridge **26** is mounted inside the main casing **2** (see FIG. **2**), and a pulled-out position in which the process cartridge **26** is pulled outside the main casing **2** (see FIG. **8**).

As will be described later in greater detail, when the toner cartridge drawer **45** is in the mounted position, each of the toner cartridges **46** is arranged in a position opposing the right side of the corresponding process cartridge **26**. Each of the toner cartridges **46** is coupled to the right side of the corresponding process cartridge **26** and can supply toner into the toner reservoir **34** of the process cartridge **26**.

(5) Image-Forming Operation

Toner supplied into the toner reservoir **34** of the process cartridge **26** from the corresponding toner cartridge **46** is supplied from the toner reservoir **34** onto the supply roller **32**, and in turn supplied onto the developing roller **31**.

The thickness-regulating blade **33** regulates the thickness of toner supplied to the developing roller **31** as the developing roller **31** rotates, maintaining the toner carried on the surface of the developing roller **31** at a thin uniform thickness. Further, toner supplied to the developing roller **31** is positively tribocharged between the thickness-regulating blade **33** and developing roller **31**.

In the meantime, the Scorotron charger **29** applies a uniform positive charge to the surface of the corresponding photosensitive drum **28** as the photosensitive drum **28** rotates.

The LED unit **35** subsequently exposes the charged surface of the photosensitive drum **28**, forming an electrostatic latent image on the surface that corresponds to an image to be printed on paper P.

As the photosensitive drum **28** continues to rotate, the positively charged toner carried on the surface of the developing roller **31** is supplied to the latent image formed on the surface of the photosensitive drum **28**. The toner develops the latent image on the photosensitive drum **28** into a visible toner image through reverse development.

The toner images developed on the surfaces of all photosensitive drums **28** are sequentially transferred onto the lower portion of the intermediate transfer belt **41**, as the lower portion of the intermediate transfer belt **41** moves rearward, as a primary transfer. The sequentially transferred toner images form a color image on the intermediate transfer belt **41**.

The color image carried on the intermediate transfer belt **41** is subsequently transferred onto a sheet of paper P supplied from the sheet-feeding unit **3**, as the sheet passes between the intermediate transfer belt **41** and secondary transfer roller **38**, as a secondary transfer.

Next, the color image transferred onto the paper P is fixed to the paper P in the fixing unit **25** by heat and pressure as the sheet passes between the heating roller **43** and pressure roller **44**.

(6) Paper Discharge

A discharge tray **47** is formed on the top surface of the main casing **2** for receiving sheets of paper P discharged from the main casing **2**. A paper-discharge unit **48** is formed on the top portion of the main casing **2** at the rear side thereof and protrudes farther upward than the discharge tray **47**.

A discharge outlet **49** is formed in the paper-discharge unit **48** at a position above the discharge tray **47**. Paper is discharged from the main casing **2** through the discharge outlet **49**. The paper-discharge unit **48** also includes three discharge rollers **50** disposed inside the discharge outlet **49** for conveying sheets of paper P toward the discharge tray **47**.

Hence, after a toner image is fixed to the sheet of paper P in the fixing unit **25**, the discharge rollers **50** discharge the sheet onto the discharge tray **47**.

2. Process Unit

(1) Process Frame

As shown in FIGS. **1**, **3**, and **4**, the process frame **27** has a generally rectangular frame-like structure with a closed bottom and open top. More specifically, the process frame **27** includes a pair of side walls **53** arranged parallel to each other and separated in the left-to-right direction, a front wall **51** bridging the front ends of the side walls **53**, and a rear wall **52** bridging the rear ends of the side walls **53**.

The front wall **51** has a handle **54** protruding forward therefrom.

Guide rollers **55** are rotatably provided in the upper rear end of each of the side walls **53**. Although not shown in the drawings, protrusions elongated in the front-to-rear direction and protruding outward in left and right directions from the left and right side walls **53** are provided on the top edges of the side walls **53**.

An exposure groove **56** is formed in the right side wall **53** for exposing a toner-receiving unit **66** (described later) of the developing device **30**. The exposure groove **56** is formed as a cutout in the top edge of the right side wall **53**, producing a concave groove that is recessed toward the lower side of the right side wall **53** and that is open on the top.

(2) Process Cartridge

Each process cartridge **26** is provided with a pair of left and right side plates **60**, the photosensitive drum **28**, the Scorotron charger **29**, and the developing device **30**.

The side plates **60** are generally plate-shaped and elongated vertically. The side plates **60** are disposed parallel to each other and separated in the left-to-right direction. An exposure hole **59** is formed in the right side plate **60** to expose a toner-receiving unit **66** (described later).

The photosensitive drum **28** is rotatably supported between the side plates **60**. The Scorotron charger **29** spans between the side plates **60**.

The developing device **30** is provided between the side plates **60**. The developing device **30** also has a developer case **61**.

The developer case **61** is integrally provided with a first frame **62** that supports both the developing roller **31** and supply roller **32**, and a second frame **63** that defines the toner reservoir **34**.

The first frame **62** has a cylindrical shape elongated in the left-to-right direction. In cross section the first frame **62** has a U-shape with the opening of the "U" facing obliquely upward and rearward. An auger screw **67** is rotatably provided in the first frame **62** to the rear of the supply roller **32**. A toner supply hole **64** and a toner recovery hole **65** are both formed in the bottom rear portion of the first frame **62** at positions confronting the rear side of the auger screw **67**.

The toner supply hole **64** is a generally rectangular through-hole formed in the left end portion of the first frame **62**. The toner recovery hole **65** is a through-hole having substantially the same shape and dimensions as the toner supply hole **64** and is formed in the right end portion of the first frame **62**. The toner supply hole **64** and toner recovery hole **65** are aligned with each other in the left-to-right direction.

The second frame **63** is provided below the rear end of the first frame **62**. The second frame **63** is formed in a partial cylindrical shape and is elongated in the left-to-right direction. A cross section of the second frame **63** is generally C-shaped, opening obliquely upward and forward. More specifically, the top of the second frame **63** is formed continuously with the lower rear portion of the first frame **62**, forming a continuous peripheral edge above the toner supply hole **64** and toner recovery hole **65**. The upper portion of the second frame **63** is also formed continuously with the lower rear portion of the first frame **62** in the region in front of and below the bottom edges of the toner supply hole **64** and toner recovery hole **65**.

The developing device **30** is further provided with a toner-receiving unit **66** on the right side of the toner reservoir **34**.

The toner-receiving unit **66** has a double-cylinder structure with two coupled cylinders arranged one above the other. The lower cylinder is a conveying cylinder **68**, and the upper cylinder is a receiving cylinder **69**.

The conveying cylinder **68** is formed continuously with the right wall of the second frame **63** and extends rightward therefrom. The conveying cylinder **68** has a generally cylindrical shape with a smaller diameter than that of the second frame **63** and has a common central axis with the second frame **63**. The left end of the conveying cylinder **68** that is continuously formed with the right wall of the second frame **63** opens into the interior of the second frame **63**, while the right end of the conveying cylinder **68** is closed.

A toner-conveying member **81** is provided inside the second frame **63** and conveying cylinder **68**.

The toner-conveying member **81** is integrally provided with an agitator **82** disposed inside the second frame **63**, and

an auger screw **83** disposed inside the conveying cylinder **68**. The agitator **82** and auger screw **83** are formed continuously in the left-to-right direction and share the same rotational shaft. The right end of the toner-conveying member **81** is rotatably supported in the right wall of the conveying cylinder **68**. The left end of the toner-conveying member **81** is rotatably supported in the left wall of the second frame **63** so as to be capable of rotating relative to the left wall, and protrudes leftward therefrom. A drive gear **84** is provided on the left end portion of the toner-conveying member **81** outside the left wall of the second frame **63** and is incapable of rotating relative to the toner-conveying member **81**. A drive force generated in the main casing **2** is inputted into the drive gear **84** via a gear train (not shown).

The receiving cylinder **69** is formed in a generally cylindrical shape that is elongated in the left-to-right direction. The lower portion of the receiving cylinder **69** is connected to the top portion of the conveying cylinder **68**. The left end of the receiving cylinder **69** is closed and is disposed at a position confronting the right side of the first frame **62** at a distance. The right end of the receiving cylinder **69** is open. The inner diameter of the receiving cylinder **69** is slightly larger than the outer diameter of a supply cylinder **98** (described later) of the toner cartridge **46** and is capable of receiving this supply cylinder **98**. A first reception opening **70** as a reception opening is formed in the right end portion of the receiving cylinder **69**, vertically penetrating the bottom portion of the same, and provides communication between the conveying cylinder **68** and receiving cylinder **69**.

The receiving cylinder **69** further includes a process-side shutter **71**, and a coupling **72** as a first coupling member. The process-side shutter **71** is generally cylindrical in shape with a closed right end and is elongated in the left-to-right direction. The process-side shutter **71** has an outer diameter substantially equal to the outer diameter of the supply cylinder **98** (described later) and a left-to-right length equivalent to about half that of the receiving cylinder **69**. A coupling exposure hole **76** is formed through the right wall of the process-side shutter **71** for exposing a fitting member **75** (described later) of the coupling **72**. The coupling exposure hole **76** has a larger diameter than that of the fitting member **75** (described later).

The process-side shutter **71** is disposed inside the receiving cylinder **69** and is capable of sliding between an open position (see FIG. **3**) in the left end of the receiving cylinder **69** for opening the first reception opening **70**, and a closed position (see FIG. **4**) in the right end of the receiving cylinder **69** for closing the first reception opening **70**. A compression spring **73** is also interposed between the left wall of the receiving cylinder **69** and the right wall of the process-side shutter **71** for constantly urging the process-side shutter **71** rightward toward the closed position.

The coupling **72** is rotatably supported in the left wall of the receiving cylinder **69**. The coupling **72** specifically includes a drive shaft **74**, the fitting member **75**, and a drive input gear **77**.

The drive shaft **74** has a generally columnar shape and extends in the left-to-right direction. The drive shaft **74** is rotatably supported in the left wall of the receiving cylinder **69**.

The fitting member **75** is provided on the right end of the drive shaft **74** and is incapable of rotating relative thereto. The fitting member **75** is generally disc-shaped and shares a central axis with the drive shaft **74**.

The drive input gear **77** is provided on the left end of the drive shaft **74** and is incapable of rotating thereto. The drive input gear **77** is positioned between the receiving cylinder **69** and first frame **62** and shares a central axis with the drive shaft **74**. A drive force generated from the main casing **2** is inputted into the drive input gear **77** via a gear train (not shown).

3. Toner Cartridges and Toner-Cartridge-Accommodating Section

(1) Toner Cartridges

As shown in FIGS. **3** and **4**, each of the toner cartridges **46** includes a cartridge case **94** accommodating toner, and a supply cylinder **98** as a supply member for supplying toner in the cartridge case **94** to the toner reservoir **34** of the process cartridge **26**.

The cartridge case **94** has a box shape that is generally rectangular in a side view. Within the cartridge case **94** are formed a toner-accommodating section **95** as a developer accommodating section for accommodating toner, and a supply-cylinder support unit **96** for supporting the supply cylinder **98**.

The toner-accommodating section **95** is provided in all but the lower portion of the cartridge case **94**. The lower end of the toner-accommodating section **95** is tapered so that its horizontal cross section grows smaller toward the bottom. A through-hole **97** as a developer discharge opening is formed in the bottom end of the toner-accommodating section **95**, opening downward.

The supply-cylinder support unit **96** is formed in the lower end of the cartridge case **94** as a through-hole in communication with the through-hole **97**. The supply-cylinder support unit **96** has a generally circular cross section and extends left-to-right. The inner diameter of the supply-cylinder support unit **96** is larger than the outer diameter of the supply cylinder **98**.

A spring-accommodating section **93** is formed in the supply-cylinder support unit **96**. The spring-accommodating section **93** is provided at a midpoint of the supply-cylinder support unit **96** with respect to the left-to-right direction (more specifically, left of the left-to-right center of the supply-cylinder support unit **96**) on the left side of the through-hole **97**. The spring-accommodating section **93** is generally circular in cross section and elongated in the left-to-right direction and has a larger diameter that expands radially outward from the inner diameter of the supply-cylinder support unit **96**.

The supply cylinder **98** has a generally cylindrical shape and is elongated in the left-to-right direction and closed on both left and right ends. The supply cylinder **98** has a left-to-right length substantially equal to the left-to-right length of the cartridge case **94**. A supply opening **99** is formed in the left end of the supply cylinder **98**, penetrating the lower portion of the supply cylinder **98** vertically. Similarly, a second reception opening **109** as a developer reception opening is formed in the right end of the supply cylinder **98**, penetrating the upper portion of the supply cylinder **98** vertically. A flange part **101** is provided around the supply cylinder **98** at approximately the left-to-right center thereof and protrudes radially outward from the outer peripheral surface of the supply cylinder **98**.

The supply cylinder **98** is provided with an auger screw **100** as a conveying member. The auger screw **100** is disposed inside the supply cylinder **98** and oriented in the left-to-right direction (in a horizontal direction). The right end of the auger screw **100** is rotatably supported in the right wall of the supply cylinder **98**, and the left end of the auger screw **100** is rotatably supported in the left wall of the supply cylinder **98** and protrudes leftward out from the left wall.

A fitting part **102** as a second coupling member and a drive input member is formed on the left end portion of the auger screw **100**. The fitting part **102** is generally disc-shaped and

shares a rotational center with the auger screw **100**. The fitting part **102** is fitted with the fitting member **75** provided on the coupling **72** of the toner-receiving unit **66** so as to be incapable of rotating relative to the fitting member **75**.

The supply cylinder **98** is supported inside the supply-cylinder support unit **96** of the cartridge case **94** so that the flange part **101** is positioned in the spring-accommodating section **93**.

This configuration for supporting the supply cylinder **98** enables the supply cylinder **98** to move left and right between a retracted position as an interrupt position and a closed position (see FIG. **4**) retracted inside the supply-cylinder support unit **96**, and an advanced position as a communication position and an open position (see FIG. **3**) advanced until the left end of the supply cylinder **98** is farther leftward than the left end of the supply-cylinder support unit **96**.

When the supply cylinder **98** is in the retracted position, the flange part **101** is disposed in the right end of the spring-accommodating section **93** and the second receiving port **109** is shifted to the right side of the through-hole **97**, interrupting communication between the second receiving port **109** and through-hole **97**. Here, the through-hole **97** is closed from below by the upper edge of the supply cylinder **98** (the portion of the supply cylinder **98** on the left side of the second receiving port **109**). Further, when the supply cylinder **98** is in the retracted position, the left and right end faces of the supply cylinder **98** are substantially flush with the left and right end faces of the cartridge case **94**.

When the supply cylinder **98** is in the advanced position, the flange part **101** is disposed in the left end portion of the spring-accommodating section **93**, and the second receiving port **109** and through-hole **97** are aligned vertically and in communication with each other.

A compression spring **103** as an urging member is interposed between the right surface of the flange part **101** and the left surface of the spring-accommodating section **93** for constantly urging the supply cylinder **98** rightward toward the retracted position. To be disposed in the advanced position, the supply cylinder **98** is moved leftward against the urging force of the compression spring **103**.

As illustrated in FIG. **1**, the black toner cartridge **46** is formed wider in the front-to-rear direction than the other toner cartridges **46** (cyan, magenta, and yellow toner cartridges **46**). A waste-toner-accommodation section (not shown) is provided in the front region of the black toner cartridge **46** separately from the toner-accommodating section **95** for accommodating waste toner conveyed from the waste toner reservoir **87**.

As shown in FIG. **6**, the black toner cartridge **46** includes a waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** coupled to the waste toner reservoir **87** of the black process cartridge **26**K.

The waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is shaped substantially the same as the supply cylinder **98**. However, instead of the supply opening **99** formed in the left end of the supply cylinder **98**, a waste-toner-receiving port (not shown) is provided in the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**, vertically penetrating the upper portion thereof, for receiving waste toner from the waste toner reservoir **87**.

When in the advanced position shown in FIG. **6**, the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is coupled to the waste toner reservoir **87** of the black process cartridge **26**K. However, when the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is in the retracted position shown in FIG. **7**, the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is disconnected from the waste toner reservoir **87**.

(2) Toner-Cartridge-Accommodating Section

As shown in FIGS. **2**, **3**, and **4**, a partitioning wall **113** divides the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** into left and right sides. The toner cartridge drawer **45** is accommodated in the left side, while a moving mechanism **111** is accommodated in the right side.

Five pressing-member insertion holes **118** (see FIG. **5**) are formed in the lower end of the partitioning wall **113** for receiving the insertion of pressing members **121** (described later).

The pressing-member insertion holes **118** are juxtaposed at intervals in the front-to-rear direction and formed at positions corresponding to the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**.

(2-1) Toner Cartridge Drawer

As shown in FIG. **1**, the toner cartridge drawer **45** has a frame-like structure that is elongated in the front-to-rear direction. The toner cartridge drawer **45** has a closed bottom but is open on the left and right sides. More specifically, the toner cartridge drawer **45** is integrally configured of a bottom wall **112**, a front wall **114**, a rear wall **115**, and three partitioning walls **116**.

The bottom wall **112** has a flat plate shape that is substantially rectangular in a plan view and elongated in the front-to-rear direction. Drawer-side rollers **117** are provided on the rear edge of the bottom wall **112** near both left and right sides thereof. The drawer-side rollers **117** are fitted with play in guide grooves **123** (described later) formed in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**.

The front wall **114** has a generally flat plate shape and extends upward from the front edge of the bottom wall **112**. The rear wall **115** has a generally flat plate shape and extends upward from the rear edge of the bottom wall **112**.

The partitioning walls **116** are arranged parallel to each other and spaced at intervals in the front-to-rear direction between the front wall **114** and rear wall **115**. Each of the partitioning walls **116** has a generally flat plate shape and extends upward from the bottom wall **112**. With this configuration, the toner cartridge drawer **45** is partitioned into four regions each having a front-to-rear length equivalent to the front-to-rear length of the corresponding toner cartridge **46**.

Each of the toner cartridges **46** is detachably supported in the toner cartridge drawer **45** in areas defined by the front wall **114**, rear wall **115**, and partitioning walls **116**.

As shown in FIG. **5**, guide grooves **123** are formed in the bottom portion of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** for receiving the drawer-side rollers **117** of the toner cartridge drawer **45**. Rail-side rollers **127** are also provided in the bottom portion of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**.

Two of the guide grooves **123** are formed in the left half portion of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** at positions separated in the left-to-right direction and corresponding to the drawer-side rollers **117** of the toner cartridge drawer **45**. The guide grooves **123** are grooves recessed downward into the bottom surface of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** and are substantially linear, extending in the front-to-rear direction.

The rail-side rollers **127** are rotatably provided in the front ends of the guide grooves **123** such that their top portions protrude upward from the guide grooves **123**.

The toner cartridge drawer **45** is accommodated in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** with the drawer-side rollers **117** fitted into the corresponding guide grooves **123**. The rail-side rollers **127** contact the bottom of the bottom wall **112** constituting the toner cartridge drawer **45**.

(2-2) Moving Mechanism

As shown in FIGS. **2**, **6**, and **7**, the moving mechanism **111** is provided with a translation cam **122** as a moving member, and five pressing members **121**. The moving member **111** is disposed on an opposite side of the supply cylinder **98** from the process cartridges **26**.

The translation cam **122** is provided in the right half of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** and is capable of sliding (reciprocating) in forward and rearward directions. The translation cam **122** has a square columnar shape extending in the front-to-rear direction and is substantially rectangular in a plan view.

The translation cam **122** includes four recessed parts **119** corresponding to the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**, and a rack part **120** as an operating portion.

The recessed parts **119** are aligned with each other and spaced at intervals in the front-to-rear direction. Each recessed part **119** has a generally trapezoidal shape in a plan view and is recessed rightward in the left surface of the translation cam **122**. Each recessed part **119** has a front surface **141** sloping rightward toward the rear, and a right surface **142** aligned in the front-to-rear direction and formed continuously from the rear end of the front surface **141**. The forwardmost recessed part **119** corresponding to the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** has a front-to-rear length approximately half that of the other recessed parts **119**.

The rack part **120** extends in the front-to-rear direction and is formed on the left side of the translation cam **122** along the bottom edge near the front end thereof. Gear teeth (not shown) are formed in the bottom edge of the rack part **120**.

The translation cam **122** is provided in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5** and is capable of sliding (reciprocating) between a first position (see FIG. **6**) accommodated in the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**, and a second position (see FIG. **7**) in which the front end portion of the translation cam **122** protrudes forward from the cartridge-side access opening **132**.

When the translation cam **122** is in the first position, each of the recessed parts **119** is offset rearward from the corresponding pressing-member insertion holes **118**. When the translation cam **122** is in the second position, the recessed parts **119** are disposed opposite the corresponding pressing-member insertion holes **118**.

A coupling member **128** is provided on the front cover **7**. By engaging the coupling member **128** with the rack part **120**, the translation cam **122** is coupled to the front cover **7**.

More specifically, the coupling member **128** has a generally curved rod shape. When the front cover **7** is in the closed position, the coupling member **128** extends from the rear surface of the front cover **7**, curving downward and rearward. Gear teeth (not shown) are formed on the top surface of the coupling member **128**. When the front cover **7** is in the closed position, the coupling member **128** engages with the rack part **120** from below.

When the front cover **7** is moved from the closed position to the open position, a forward drive force is transmitted to the translation cam **122** via the coupling member **128** for moving the translation cam **122** from the first position to the second position. As the front cover **7** moves further toward the open position, the coupling member **128** separates from the rack part **120** of the translation cam **122**.

Conversely, as the front cover **7** is moved from the open position toward the closed position, the rear end (free end) of the coupling member **128** engages with the rear end of the rack part **120** provided on the translation cam **122**. As the front cover **7** moves further toward the closed position, a rearward drive force is transmitted to the translation cam **122** via the coupling member **128** for moving the translation cam **122** from the second position to the first position.

The pressing members **121** are arranged at intervals on the left side of the translation cam **122** in positions corresponding to the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**. Each pressing member **121** has a generally columnar shape and extends in the left-to-right direction. The left-to-right length of the pressing members **121** is slightly longer than the gap between the right surface **142** of the recessed parts **119** formed in the translation cam **122** and the right surface of the partitioning wall **113**. A flange part **129** is provided on the right end of each pressing member **121**. The flange part **129** protrudes radially outward from the outer surface of the pressing member **121**.

Each pressing member **121** can be moved between a pressing position (see FIG. **6**) in which the pressing member **121** is inserted into the corresponding pressing-member insertion hole **118** and presses the corresponding supply cylinder **98** or waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** leftward, and a release position (see FIG. **7**) in which the pressing member **121** is retracted to the right side of the corresponding pressing-member insertion hole **118**, releasing pressure on the corresponding supply cylinder **98** or waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**.

A compression spring **108** is interposed between the left surface of each flange part **129** and the right surface of the partitioning wall **113**. The compression springs **108** constantly urge the corresponding pressing members **121** rightward toward the release position.

When the translation cam **122** is in the first position, the right end of each pressing member **121** contacts the left surface of the translation cam **122** on the front side of the corresponding recessed part **119**. In this state, each pressing member **121** has been moved leftward against the urging force of the compression spring **108** and is in the pressing position shown in FIG. **6**.

When the translation cam **122** is disposed in the second position, the right end of each pressing member **121** opposes the right surface **142** of the corresponding recessed part **119**. In this state, the pressing member **121** has been moved rightward by the urging force of the compression spring **108** and is in the release position shown in FIG. **7**.

4. Main Casing

As shown in FIGS. **3**, **6**, and **9**, a partitioning wall **131** is provided in the main casing **2** for separating the image-forming unit **4** and toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**. Process-unit guide grooves **134** are formed in the main casing **2** for guiding the process unit **23** as the process unit **23** slides.

The partitioning wall **131** has a general flat plate shape. The partitioning wall **131** is disposed between the image-forming unit **4** and toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**. Five through-holes **135** are formed in the partitioning wall **131** to allow insertion of the four supply cylinders **98** of the toner cartridges **46** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**.

The through-holes **135** are substantially circular in a side view and are arranged at positions spaced in the front-to-rear direction that correspond to the supply cylinders **98** of the toner cartridges **46** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104**.

One of the process-unit guide grooves **134** is formed in the right surface of the left wall of the main casing **2** while the other is formed in the left surface of the partitioning wall **131**. The process-unit guide grooves **134** extend in the front-to-rear direction and are substantially linear. The process-unit

guide grooves **134** have a width (vertical dimension) sufficient to receive the guide rollers **55** of the process unit **23**.

5. Operations for Mounting and Removing the Toner Cartridges

To remove the toner cartridges **46** mounted in the main casing **2**, first the operator places the front cover **7** in the open position, as shown in FIG. **2**, to expose the cartridge-side access opening **132**.

When the front cover **7** is moved from the closed position to the open position, the translation cam **122** is pulled forward through the coupling member **128**, moving the translation cam **122** from the first position shown in FIG. **6** to the second position shown in FIG. **7**.

When the translation cam **122** is moved to the second position, the urging force of the compression springs **108** moves the corresponding pressing members **121** from their pressing position to their release position.

At the same time, the urging force of the compression springs **103** moves the corresponding supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** from their advanced position to their retracted position so that the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** are extracted from the through-holes **135** of the partitioning wall **131**, as shown in FIGS. **4** and **7**. That is, the moving mechanism **111** moves the supply cylinders **98** of all toner cartridges **46** altogether between the advanced position to the retracted position at a time.

This retraction interrupts communication between the supply openings **99** of the supply cylinders **98** and the first reception openings **70** of the receiving cylinders **69** and also interrupts communication between the second receiving ports **109** of the supply cylinders **98** and the through-holes **97** of the toner-accommodating sections **95**. In addition, the fitting parts **102** of the supply cylinders **98** are moved rightward and separated from the fitting members **75** of the corresponding receiving cylinders **69**, and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is uncoupled from the waste toner reservoir **87**.

At this time, the toner cartridge drawer **45** can be pulled forward.

Further, the process-side shutters **71** are moved to the closed position by the urging force of the corresponding compression springs **73** at this time.

To move the toner cartridges **46**, the operator pulls the toner cartridge drawer **45** forward through the cartridge-side access opening **132**. When the toner cartridge drawer **45** reaches the pulled-out position, the drawer-side rollers **117** contact the rear side of the rail-side rollers **127**, as shown in FIG. **8**. This contact between the rail-side rollers **127** and the drawer-side rollers **117** restricts the toner cartridge drawer **45** from being pulled farther.

To remove the toner cartridges **46**, the operator lifts the toner cartridges **46** up and out of the toner cartridge drawer **45**. This completes the operation to remove toner cartridges **46** from the main casing **2**.

In order to mount toner cartridges **46** in the main casing **2**, the procedure described above for removing the toner cartridges **46** is performed in reverse.

Specifically, while the toner cartridge drawer **45** is disposed in the pulled-out position, the operator inserts the toner cartridges **46** into the toner cartridge drawer **45** from above to a prescribed position within the toner cartridge drawer **45**.

To mount the toner cartridges **46** in the main casing **2**, the operator then pushes the toner cartridge drawer **45** rearward through the cartridge-side access opening **132**. As the toner cartridge drawer **45** is pushed rearward, the rear end of the toner cartridge drawer **45** contacts the rear wall of the toner-cartridge-accommodating section **5**, as shown in FIG. **7**. At this time, the toner cartridge drawer **45** is in the mounted position.

In this position, the supply cylinders **98** of the toner cartridge **46** face the right sides of the receiving cylinders **69** in the corresponding process cartridges **26** through the through-holes **135** formed in the partitioning wall **131**. The waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** of the toner cartridge **46** confronts the right side of the waste toner reservoir **87** in the black process cartridge **26**K through the through-hole **135** of the partitioning wall **131**.

Next, the operator moves the front cover **7** to its closed position, thereby closing the cartridge-side access opening **132**. As the front cover **7** moves from the open position to the closed position, the translation cam **122** is pushed rearward through the coupling member **128**, moving the translation cam **122** from the second position shown in FIG. **7** to the first position shown in FIG. **6**.

As the translation cam **122** moves toward the first position, each of the pressing members **121** is pushed leftward by the sloping front surfaces **141** of the recessed parts **119**. Hence, the pressing members **121** move from their release position to their pressing position against the urging force of the compression springs **108**.

At the same time, the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** are pressed leftward by the corresponding pressing members **121**. As shown in FIG. **3**, the supply cylinders **98** and the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** move from their retracted position to their advanced position against the urging force of the compression springs **103** and are inserted through the through-holes **135** formed in the partitioning wall **131**.

Consequently, each of the supply cylinders **98** contacts the right ends of the process-side shutters **71** in the corresponding process cartridges **26** from the right side. As the supply cylinders **98** are pressed further leftward, each of the supply cylinders **98** is inserted into the corresponding receiving cylinders **69** against the urging force of the compression springs **73** while pressing the process-side shutters **71** leftward.

When the supply cylinders **98** reach the advanced position, the process-side shutters **71** are disposed in their open position. Similarly, the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** is coupled to the waste toner reservoir **87**. By inserting the supply cylinders **98** into the receiving cylinders **69** and coupling the waste-toner-conveying cylinder **104** with the waste toner reservoir **87**, the toner cartridge drawer **45** is no longer movable in forward and rearward directions.

At this time, the supply openings **99** in the supply cylinders **98** and the first reception openings **70** of the receiving cylinders **69** oppose each other vertically and are in communication. Further, the second receiving ports **109** of the supply cylinders **98** vertically oppose the through-holes **97** of the toner-accommodating sections **95** and are in communication with the same. The fitting parts **102** of the supply cylinders **98** are fitted with the fitting members **75** of the corresponding receiving cylinders **69** through the coupling exposure holes **76** of the process-side shutters **71**.

This completes the process for mounting the toner cartridges **46** in the main casing **2**.

6. Operations for Supplying Toner from the Toner Cartridges to the Process Cartridges

At the beginning of an image-forming operation performed on the printer **1**, a drive source (not shown) in the main casing **2** inputs a drive force into the drive input gears **77** of the

receiving cylinders **69**. As shown in FIG. **3**, the drive force is transmitted to the auger screws **100** of the toner cartridges **46** via the couplings **72** of the receiving cylinders **69** for rotating the auger screws **100**.

The drive source (not shown) provided in the main casing **2** also inputs a drive force into the drive gears **84** of the toner reservoirs **34**. The drive force is transmitted to the toner-conveying members **81** of the toner reservoirs **34** to rotate the same.

As a result, the auger screws **100** convey toner, which has been supplied from the toner-accommodating sections **95** of the toner cartridges **46** into the supply cylinders **98** through the through-holes **97** and second receiving ports **109**, leftward through the supply cylinders **98**. The toner conveyed leftward in the supply cylinders **98** is supplied through the first reception openings **70** formed in the process cartridges **26** via the supply openings **99**.

Toner supplied through the first reception openings **70** is conveyed leftward through the conveying cylinders **68** by the auger screws **83** of the toner-conveying members **81** and is supplied into the toner reservoirs **34** of the process cartridges **26**.

Toner supplied to the toner reservoirs **34** is subsequently agitated by the agitators **82** of the toner-conveying members **81** while being conveyed leftward through the toner reservoirs **34**. The toner is supplied through the toner supply holes **64** into the first frames **62** of the developing devices **30**.

The toner supplied into the first frames **62** is accumulated therein and subsequently supplied to the developing rollers **31** by the supply rollers **32**, as described above.

The auger screws **67** in the first frames **62** (see FIG. **1**) convey toner in the first frames **62** from the left side toward the right side. Excess toner passes through the toner recovery holes **65** and is collected in the toner reservoirs **34** so that the level of toner in the first frames **62** does not exceed a prescribed level.

7. Mounting and Removing the Process Cartridges

To remove the process cartridges **26** when the process cartridges **26** are mounted in the main casing **2**, the operator first places the front cover **7** in the open position, as shown in FIG. **2**, thereby exposing the process-side access opening **6**.

Next, the operator pulls the process unit **23** forward through the process-side access opening **6**. As the process unit **23** is pulled forward, the guide rollers **55** of the process frame **27** are guided in the process-unit guide grooves **134** formed in the main casing **2** until the process unit **23** reaches the pulled-out position.

In this state, the operator can lift the process cartridges **26** up and out of the process frame **27**, thereby completing the removal of the process cartridges **26** from the main casing **2**.

When mounting the process cartridges **26** in the main casing **2**, the procedure for removing the process cartridges **26** described above is performed in reverse. That is, while the process frame **27** is disposed in the pulled-out position, the operator inserts the process cartridges **26** into the process frame **27** from above until the process cartridges **26** are in a prescribed position.

Next, the operator pushes the process unit **23** rearward through the process-side access opening **6**. As the process unit **23** moves rearward, the guide rollers **55** of the process frame **27** are guided in the process-unit guide grooves **134** formed in the main casing **2** until the process unit **23** reaches the mounted position.

Next, the operator moves the front cover **7** into its closed position to cover the process-side access opening **6**, thereby completing the operation for mounting the process cartridges **26** in the main casing **2**.

8. Operational Advantages

(1) As illustrated in FIGS. **6**, **7**, and **8**, after the supply cylinders **98** are moved from the advanced position to the retracted position in the printer **1** of the embodiment, the toner cartridge drawer **45** can be pulled in a forward direction from the mounted position out of the main casing **2**.

Hence, the toner cartridge drawer **45** having a structure for providing communication between the toner cartridges **46** and process cartridges **26** in the left-to-right direction can be moved forward and rearward by retracting the supply cylinders **98** of the toner cartridges **46** rightward from the process cartridges **26**.

With this configuration, the space on the right side of the printer **1** required for mounting and removing the toner cartridges **46** can be greatly reduced, thereby minimizing the space required for installing the printer **1**.

Further, even when the printer **1** is installed on a shelf or other location with limited space on left and right sides of the printer **1**, the toner cartridge drawer **45** can be pulled forward for replacing the toner cartridges **46**. As a result, this configuration enhances the user's options for locations in which the printer **1** can be installed.

(2) As shown in FIGS. **6** and **7**, the moving mechanism **111** of the printer **1** can move the supply cylinders **98** of all toner cartridges **46** altogether between the advanced position and retracted position at a time. Therefore, the moving mechanism **111** can move all supply cylinders **98** from the advanced position to the retracted position or from the retracted position to the advanced position in one operation.

(3) As shown in FIG. **2**, the translation cam **122** in the printer **1** of the embodiment includes the rack part **120** on the front end thereof. With this construction, an operator can easily access the rack part **120** of the translation cam **122** from the same side (front side) as the toner cartridge drawer **45**.

(4) As shown in FIGS. **6** and **7**, the supply cylinders **98** can be maintained constantly in the retracted position by the urging force of the compression springs **103**, interrupting communication between the supply openings **99** and corresponding first reception openings **70**.

Further, through a simple structure for reciprocating the translation cam **122** in forward and rearward directions, the supply cylinders **98** can be moved between the advanced position and retracted position.

(5) As shown in FIGS. **6** and **7**, the supply cylinders **98** can be moved to the retracted position in association with the opening operation of the front cover **7** and can be moved to the advanced position in association with the closing operation of the front cover **7**.

(6) As shown in FIG. **3**, each supply cylinder **98** in the printer **1** has the auger screw **100** for conveying toner toward the supply opening **99**. Hence, the printer **1** can reliably convey toner toward the supply opening **99** to maintain a stable supply of toner in the process cartridge **26**.

Further, since the auger screw **100** and supply cylinder **98** move together between the retracted position and the advanced position, the auger screw **100** does not interfere with movement of the toner cartridge drawer **45** in the forward and rearward directions. Therefore, the toner cartridge drawer **45** can be moved smoothly in the forward and rearward directions.

(7) With the printer **1** described above, by moving the supply cylinder **98** from the retracted position to the advanced position and coupling the coupling **72** of the receiving cylinder **69** with the fitting part **102** of the supply cylinder **98**, as shown in FIG. **3**, a drive force generated in the main casing **2** can be transmitted to the supply cylinder **98**.

Further, by moving the supply cylinder **98** from the advanced position to the retracted position and decoupling the coupling **72** of the receiving cylinder **69** from the fitting part **102** of the supply cylinder **98**, as shown in FIG. **4**, transmission of the drive force to the supply cylinder **98** can be cancelled.

(8) As shown in FIG. **9**, the process cartridges **26** can be mounted in the main casing **2** or pulled out of the main casing **2** in the front-to-rear direction. Therefore, maintenance can be performed on the process cartridges **26** from the front side of the printer **1**.

(9) As shown in FIGS. **3** and **4**, direct communication can be established between the toner-accommodating section **95** of the toner cartridge **46** and the toner reservoir **34** of the developing device **30** in the corresponding process cartridge **26**, without any separate member interposed therebetween, simply by moving the supply cylinder **98**.

(10) As shown in FIGS. **8** and **9**, the toner cartridges **46** and process cartridges **26** can be replaced independently of each other by retracting the supply cylinders **98**.

(11) As shown in FIG. **3**, the supply cylinder **98** of the toner cartridge **46** can open and close the through-hole **97** formed in the toner-accommodating section **95** and can supply toner from the toner-accommodating section **95** leftward.

Hence, operations for opening and closing the through-hole **97** and for supplying toner can be achieved simultaneously through a simple structure that does not require separate members for opening and closing the through-hole **97** and for supplying the toner leftward.

(12) As shown in FIG. **7**, the supply cylinder **98** can be maintained constantly in the retracted position by the urging force of the compression spring **103**, thereby closing the through-hole **97**.

(13) As shown in FIG. **3**, the supply cylinder **98** of the toner cartridge **46** includes the auger screw **100** for conveying toner leftward. Hence, through a simple yet reliable construction, a stable supply of toner can be conveyed leftward to the process cartridge **26**.

(14) As shown in FIG. **3**, a drive force is easily inputted into the fitting part **102** when the supply cylinder **98** is moved to the left side.

9. Variations of the Embodiment

In the embodiment described above, the supply cylinders **98** are moved to the retracted position in association with the opening operation of the front cover **7** and are moved to the advanced position in association with the closed operation of the front cover **7**. However, instead of associating the operations of the front cover **7** and translation cam **122**, the printer **1** may be configured such that the user directly operates the front end of the translation cam **122** after opening the front cover **7**.

In this case, the front cover **7** is not provided with the coupling member **128**, and the rack part **120** is not provided on the translation cam **122**.

The user first opens the front cover **7** and subsequently pulls the translation cam **122** forward to move the supply cylinders **98** into the retracted position. The user pushes the translation cam **122** rearward to move the supply cylinders **98** into the advanced position.

What is claimed is:

1. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a main casing;

a plurality of process units, each of the plurality of process units comprising:

a photosensitive drum; and

a developer carrying member disposed in confrontation with the photosensitive drum;

a plurality of developer cartridges, each of the plurality of developer cartridges configured to be provided for each of the plurality of process units, each of the plurality of developer cartridges comprising:

a developer accommodating section configured to accommodate developer; and

a transporting member configured to transport developer in the developer accommodating section to a corresponding one of the plurality of process units and to be moved between a communicated position, in which developer is transported to the corresponding one of the plurality of process units, and an interrupted position, in which transporting of developer to the corresponding one of the plurality of process units is interrupted;

a process unit supporting member configured to hold the plurality of process units together therein and to be withdrawn in a predetermined direction;

a cartridge supporting member configured to hold the plurality of developer cartridges together therein and to move between an attached position, in which the cartridge supporting member is attached to the main casing, and a withdrawn position, in which the cartridge supporting member is withdrawn from the main casing; and

a moving mechanism configured to move each of the plurality of transporting members between the communicated position and the interrupted position,

wherein the transporting member positioned in the interrupted position allows the cartridge supporting member to move from the attached position to the withdrawn position and allows the process unit supporting member to be withdrawn, and the transporting member positioned in the communicated position prevents the cartridge supporting member from moving from the attached position to the withdrawn position and prevents the process unit supporting member from being withdrawn.

2. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the moving mechanism comprises a translation cam configured to be reciprocated in the predetermined direction.

3. The image forming apparatus according to claim **2**, wherein the translation cam is configured to move the transporting member from the interrupted position to the communicated position.

4. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the moving mechanism comprises an urging member configured to urge the transporting member toward the interrupted position.

5. The image forming apparatus according to claim **4**, wherein the urging member is configured to move the transporting member from the communicated position to the interrupted position.

6. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein each of the plurality of process units further comprises:

a receiving portion formed with a reception opening configured to receive developer; and

a shutter member configured to open and close the reception opening,

wherein each transporting member is formed with a supply opening through which developer in the developer accommodating section is configured to be supplied to a corresponding one of the plurality of process units,

wherein in response to movement of each transporting member from the interrupted position to the communicated position, the shutter member of each of the plurality of process units opens the reception opening of a corresponding one of the plurality of process units and the reception opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of process units and the supply opening of a corresponding one of the plurality of developer cartridges are in communication with each other, and in response to movement of each transporting member from the communicated position to the interrupted position, the shutter member of each of the plurality of process units closes the reception opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of process units and communication of the reception opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of process units and the supply opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of developer cartridges is released.

7. The image forming apparatus according to claim **6**, wherein the transporting member of each of the plurality of developer cartridges is moved away from a corresponding one of the plurality of process units to interrupt a communication between the reception opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of process units and the supply opening of each of the plurality of developer cartridges.

8. The image forming apparatus according to claim **7**, wherein the plurality of process units is juxtaposedly arrayed with each other in the predetermined direction,

wherein each photosensitive drum has an axis extending in an axial direction perpendicular to the predetermined direction, and

wherein each of the plurality of developer cartridges is configured to be disposed in confrontation with a corresponding one of the plurality of process units in the axial direction.

9. The image forming apparatus according to claim **8**, wherein the transporting member of each of the plurality of developer cartridges is moved away from a corresponding one of the plurality of process units in the axial direction to interrupt a communication between the reception opening of the corresponding one of the plurality of process units and the supply opening of each of the plurality of developer cartridges when the transporting member is in the interrupted position.

10. The image forming apparatus according to claim **7**, wherein the cartridge supporting member is exposed outside the main casing when the cartridge supporting member is in the withdrawn position.

11. The image forming apparatus according to claim **10**, wherein the cartridge supporting member includes a side wall disposed in confrontation with the plurality of developer cartridges in an axial direction, the side wall being disposed on an opposite side of the plurality of developer cartridges from the plurality of process units in the axial direction.

12. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the cartridge supporting member is configured to move between the attached position and the withdrawn position in the predetermined direction.

13. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the transporting member is configured to be moved between the communicated position and the interrupted position in a direction perpendicular to the predetermined direction.

14. The image forming apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein when the transporting member is positioned in the communicated position, an end of the transporting member is positioned outside the cartridge supporting member and inside the process unit supporting member, and when the transporting member is positioned in the interrupted position, the end of the transporting member is positioned outside the process unit supporting member and inside the cartridge supporting member.

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